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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ATHENS 000210

SIPDIS

FOR IRS PARIS

FOR CA/OCS/CCS/EUR AND EUR/EX

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: BEXP EFIN OTRA GR CTRYCLR

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE AND THREAT ASSESSMENT FOR
IRS TAX SPECIALIST

REF: PARIS 00093

¶1. Embassy warmly welcomes and grants country clearance for the visit of IRS Tax Specialist, Carol ¶A. Saunders March 9-March 15, 2005 to provide assistance to overseas residents (part of a customer service tour).

¶2. Per reftel no Embassy assistance is requested.

¶3. Pursuant to State 66580 dated March 25, 2004, country clearance for any person on TDY for 30 days or more is granted contingent on completion of the mandatory personal security training. The Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) conducts the approved minimum four-day training class, "Serving Abroad for Families & Employees (S.A.F.E.)." This is the same course required for employees and highly recommended for their eligible family members over the age of 18.

¶4. It is important that all visitors carefully read the information and instructions provided below. Post wants to ensure the best possible service to all official visitors and will work closely to arrange details of each visit.

¶5. Early morning check-in: For those coming from Washington, D.C., often on the early morning Delta flight arriving at 1005, please note there is no guarantee of early check-in at the hotel. Normal check-in time is 1400. Although post can request early check-in for travelers, the only way to guarantee a room waiting is to reserve it for the preceding night. Travelers who wish to book the previous night must request post to make this reservation. The traveler is responsible for this expense. Travelers should be prepared to go from the airport directly to the office/meetings if they have not paid for a room the night before. The Embassy has a cafeteria that serves breakfast and lunch.

¶6. Arrivals: We expect to be able to provide transportation for official visitors at the Deputy Assistant Secretary level and above upon arrival at the airport. Other visitors should plan to use taxis. The price of a taxi from Athens airport to downtown is approximately 28 - 30 euros. Depending on traffic, the trip to the Embassy takes 40 to 60 minutes.

¶7. Documents required: Diplomatic and official passport holders must have Greek diplomatic visas, a valid Schengen visa or diplomatic ID from any other Schengen country, in addition to their passport, in order to enter Greece. The Embassy will be unable to obtain plane-side visas for USG employees arriving in Greece without proper documentation. Holders of tourist passports do not/not require visas. USG employees who plan to operate a motor vehicle while in Greece must be in possession of a valid U.S. drivers' license as well as a valid International Drivers' License and must carry proof of third party liability insurance while operating the vehicle.

¶8. Embassy access: Embassy Athens has installed a new identification badging system, which requires that all Department of State employees bring their Global ID and/or Smart Card that will be acknowledged as proper Embassy ID. DOS employees will be expected to stop by the RSO Office to program their ID to be compatible with the Athens system.

¶9. Regional Medical Office: The Health Unit at the Embassy is fully staffed. A State Department medical clearance is required by all employees of agencies participating in ICASS who will be traveling TDY for more than 60 days a year. Health Unit access is not guaranteed without this clearance. Family members will not have access to the Health Unit unless they are on employees' travel orders. We strongly recommend that TDYers bring with them proof of current medical insurance coverage and medevac coverage if obtained.

¶10. Currency: Greece is a member of the European Monetary Union, and the Euro is the currency of the country. Accommodation exchange is available on a limited basis

(responsible agency/section signed authorization) at the Embassy cashier office hours are M-F 0900 1100 and 1400 1600. However, ATMs are readily available throughout the country (there is also one at the Embassy); they will accept U.S. debit cards. In addition, most banks and major hotels provide accommodation exchange services. Post is unable to provide reverse accommodation.

¶11. Office space/laptops/mobile phones: Office space in both classified and unclassified areas is extremely limited. For those employees planning on bringing laptops and modems to use in their hotels, please remember that this equipment can be used for processing unclassified (non-SBU) information only. Current here is 220 volt, 50 cycles, and outlets are two-pronged. Bring along a plug adapter and equipment that can handle the voltage. Laptops are not permitted in controlled access areas of the he Embassy. European GSM mobile phones function normally in Greece.

¶12. Presidential Directive - Trafficking in Persons: All TDY personnel are reminded that President Bush has signed a National Security Presidential Directive to advance the fight against trafficking in persons. The United States is committed to eradicate trafficking both domestically and abroad. Trafficking in persons exists in Greece. A significant number of the people involved in prostitution, pornography and the sex tourism phenomenon, are trafficked. They are compelled by force, fraud and coercion to submit to sexual exploitation. TDY personnel are advised that any involvement with the commercial sex industry is unacceptable in light of the diplomatic and foreign policy goals of the United States and the ethical standards of the Department of State and this Mission. Embassy Management will not tolerate any such involvement by Mission personnel and, in this regard, will enforce all relevant regulations regarding conduct and suitability of U.S. Government employees stationed abroad.

¶13. Security information:

¶A. Embassy Athens is designated "critical" for indigenous terrorism. In the past, local Greek terrorist groups have targeted prominent Greeks as well as certain non-Greek Officials, including Americans. We believe that the threat to official US Government personnel on short-term assignments to Greece or visiting for tourism is relatively low. The indigenous groups historically have engaged in extensive operational surveillance over long periods of time. In 2003 and again in 2004, the Greek Government made significant progress to combat domestic terrorism by successfully convicting the leader and key hit men of the November 17 terrorist organization and of the ELA. 17N was responsible for assassinating prominent Greeks and five members of the US Mission over the course of its 30-year history. Convicted ELA members were responsible for several bombings, attempted murders and were involved in at least one assassination. While these convictions likely impacted on the operational capabilities of 17N and ELA, it is too soon to assess whether the threat from domestic terrorism is completely eliminated. We urge vigilance and caution, as the worldwide threat from other terrorist groups against Americans in general remains high. Official Americans should assume they are potential targets.

¶B. Over the past year the U.S. Embassy has experienced numerous bomb threats, protest marches, and anti-U.S. demonstrations. These protests are generally peaceful though a few provoked random acts of violence. Travelers to Greece are advised that protests or demonstrations could occur at any time; unwitting observers or bystanders might be identified, to their disadvantage, as Americans. RSO recommends that official U.S. travelers in Greece remain alert when moving about in public places and avoid certain places where demonstrators frequently congregate. These places include the Polytechnical University area, located on 28 October (Patission) Street between the National Archeological Museum and Omonia Square; Exarchion Square, located near Kolonaki; Omonia and Syntagma Squares, which are often used as launch sites for large demonstrations; and Mavili Square, located near the U.S. Embassy. Visitors should keep abreast of news about large demonstrations and avoid these areas and metro stops.

¶C. Crime is rated "medium" in Greece. For TDY visitors, pick-pocketing and purse snatching are the most common crimes. Taxis are generally safe though metered cabs are recommended. Taxis too will often pick up more than one passenger unless prior arrangements are made. Crimes of opportunity thefts, break-ins, and occasional scams are on the rise. Travelers should be especially cautious with wallets, purses, and parcels when traveling on crowded streets, public buses, trolleys, and/or subways. There have been several instances of motorcyclists approaching

cars stuck in traffic, reaching through open windows or smashing closed ones, and stealing whatever is within reach. We have also recently learned of a new scenario in which motorcyclists open the trunk of a vehicle and remove the contents. The Embassy recommends keeping purses, parcels, handbags, etc. out of sight under the seat or on the floor of the car. Windows should be kept closed and doors locked. Pedestrians may also be confronted by beggars and other street people who may attempt to divert attention, then steal unprotected valuables either by pick-pocketing or snatch-and-grab techniques. Women are generally safe from violent crime in Greece. Men are aggressive by American standards however when pursuing women.

1D. Traffic in Greek urban areas, especially Athens and Thessaloniki, is chaotic. Greece leads the European Union in traffic fatalities. Road rage is common. Accidents often lead to fist fights. Drivers in Greece should exercise caution and common sense. Drivers and pedestrians alike should exercise extreme caution when operating motor vehicles or when walking along roadways. Moreover, tourists who rent motorbikes either on the Greek mainland or its islands must wear helmets and must take special precautions on the local roads that are typically poorly maintained and frequently pothole-ridden. Greece also leads the European Union in motorcycle deaths.

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